**Reading 1**

**Prohibition Enforcement**

Advocates of Prohibition did not believe it would be necessary to establish a large administrative apparatus to enforce the law and as a result, the federal government never had more than 2,500 agents enforcing the law. Congress, anticipating general compliance with the liquor ban, budgeted only $5 million for enforcement originally, but several years later, the government estimated enforcement would cost $300 million.

For those who executed the law, the surest method of enforcement was to shut off the supply of liquor at its source. But consider what this meant. The coastlines and land borders of the United States offered an 18,700-mile invitation to smugglers while thousands of druggists were permitted to sell alcohol on doctors' prescriptions and many more bootleggers were contributing to the flow of alcohol.[[1]](#footnote-1)



http://www.teachersparadise.com/ency/en/wikipedia/p/pr/prohibition.html

Below is an excerpt about some of the challenges of enforcing Prohibition from the 1931 **Report on the Enforcement of the Prohibition Laws of the United States. This report was c**onducted by the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement. (Enforcement, 1931)

Dated January 7, 1931

**THE BAD START AND ITS RESULTS**

It must be said that enforcement of the National Prohibition Act made a bad start which has affected enforcement ever since. Many things contributed to this bad start.

* The magnitude of the task was not appreciated. It seems to have been anticipated that the fact of the constitutional amendment and federal statute having put the federal government behind national prohibition would of itself operate largely to make the law effective. For a time, there appeared some warrant for this belief. But soon after 1921 a marked change took place. It became increasingly evident that violation was much easier and enforcement much more difficult than had been supposed. The means of enforcement provided proved increasingly inadequate. No survey of the difficulties [of enforcement] and consideration of how to meet them was undertaken, however, until violations had made such headway as to create a strong and growing public feeling of the futility of the law.

Taken From: Enforcement, N. C. (1931, January 7). *Report on the Enforcement of the Prohibtion Laws of the United States.* Retrieved August 12, 2010, from Schaffer Library of Drug Policy: http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/Library/studies/wick/index.html

* A lack of experience of federal enforcement of a law of this sort. There was no federal police power and the use of federal powers for police purposes became important only in the present century. The existing federal machinery of law enforcement had not been set up for any such tasks and was ill adapted to those imposed upon it by the National Prohibition Act. But it was sought to adapt that machinery, or to let it find out how to adapt itself, without much prevision of the difficulties. Inadequate organization and equipment have resulted.
* Another cause was lack of coordination of the several federal agencies actually or potentially concerned in enforcing prohibition, and consequent relative failure of cooperation until attention was given to this matter within the past few years.
* Finally, enforcement was relied on in and of itself without any reinforcing activities to promote observance. After the passing of the National Prohibition Act, the educational activities toward a public opinion opposed to the use of intoxicating liquor gradually lost their impetus and largely became dormant. For a decade little or nothing has been done in this connection although such activities were peculiarly needed in an era of relaxing of standards of conduct and general free self-assertion. As a result too heavy a burden was put upon enforcement from the beginning and during the critical period in its history.

1. Adapted from:

   Allen, F. L. (n.d.). *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*. Retrieved August 12, 2010, from http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/Allen/Cover.html

   *Digital History: Prohibition* . (n.d.). Retrieved August 12, 2010, from http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article\_display.cfm?HHID=441

   Kyvig, D. E. (2000). *Repealing National Prohibition.* Kent: The Kent State University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)